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ABSTRACT

Linguists of various theoretical backgrounds have likened second language (L2) acquisition to pidginization (Ferguson 1971, Richards 1971, Bickerton 1975a). This paper examines these two processes and suggests areas where a study of the process of second language acquisition in a natural setting might contribute insights to a general theory of linguistics. A distinction is made between L2 acquisition in a classroom situation and that in a natural setting without formal instruction, and the processes of the pidgin-creole-post-creole cycle as described in the literature are reviewed. A comparison of these situations reveals that while there is nothing in the L2 acquisition process analogous to creolization, the early stages of L2 acquisition are reminiscent of a pidgin. It also leads us to expect a continuum situation in natural L2 acquisition similar to that found in the decreolization process. The changes involved in second language acquisiton, however, can be expected to be more rapid and irregular than those of the pidgin-creole-decreolization continuum. A study of natural second language acquisition by adults can offer insights concerning both the notion of "simplified" speech and the psychological validity of constraints on rules which express language change. (Author)

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Second Language Acquisition and the Pidgin-Creole-Decreolization Cycle. A Comparison of Some Linguistic Processes

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The notion that the process of acquiring a second language can be compared to pidginization is not unique to this paper. Linguists of various theoretical backgrounds have likened the two processes (see, for example, Ferguson 1971, Richards 1971, Bickerton 1975a). The purpose of this paper is to examine these two processes and to suggest areas where a study of the process of second language acquisition in a natural setting might contribute insights to a general theory of linguistics. The first section of this paper is a general definition of terms. It distinguishes between second language acquisition with teaching and second language acquisition without teaching. Section one also defines the interpretation of "process of pidginization" used in this paper. Sections two and three examine the similarities and differences among the second language learning processes and pidginization processes. The fourth section looks at some questions in the field of linguistic theory and points out what one might hope to add to a general theory of language by the study of second language acquisition without teaching which could not be added by a study of the other processes.

1. Description of the Processes

1.1 Second Language Acquisition with Instruction

This process really takes place in a number of quite different situations. The first situation is one in which the second language is taught in a monolingual setting where the language of that setting is the native language of the learners. This is the situation of most native English speakers learning foreign languages in the United States. Similar situations are also found in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. In countries like Thailand and Japan, for example, where the study of English is mandatory from the junior high school level on, the students have very little opportunity to use the language outside of the language classroom. In such situations, the study of the language often becomes little more than a mental exercise. Situations of this sort will not be considered in this paper.

A second situation occurs in countries where the second language is used as the official language and is one, if not the only, medium of instruction in the school system, as is the case in countries like the Philippines and India. The difference between this situation and the first is the degree to which the second language is relevant in the daily lives of the members of the community. In the second situation, anyone wishing to hold down one of the more responsible positions or to communicate across linguistically distinct groups in a polyglot society must have a command of the second language. In this situation, however, the second language is not necessary in the day-to-day dealings within the family or with

one's neighbors and fellow villagers, since they usually speak the same native language. Again, this paper will not make specific reference to this kind of situation.

Another type of situation which falls under the first heading mentioned above is one in which the second language is acquired in the second language setting. This situation applies to students studying in foreign countries and to immigrants who choose to enroll in foreign language courses in the new environment. In such situations, the acquisition of the second language is absolutely essential for the day-to-day functioning in society, since there may be no speakers of the student's native language in the community.

While much has been written about the teaching of foreign languages in these situations, very little is known about the process of second language acquisition itself. An investigation of language acquisition in the above three situations may very well reveal that the processes are the same in all three. All three situations, after all, involve learners who are usually already literate in their first languages. These situations also usually involve learning of the written language together with the learning of the spoken language. Finally, all three situations involve teachers and texts. All of these similarities may affect the kinds of expectations the learner has and the kinds of generalizations the learner makes about the new language. On the other hand, the discrepancy between what the learner is told about the language and what the learner hears of the language in the second and third situations may have the opposite effect. To facilitate the comparison between the process of second language acquisition with instruction and the other two processes mentioned in the opening paragraph, the remarks in this paper concerning second language acquisition with teaching will be limited to situations of the last type. I will also limit my discussion to adults learning second languages in this situation.

1.2 Second Language Acquisition without Instruction

One can imagine second language acquisition without instruction taking place in a variety of ways. Children growing up in a bilingual situation, for example, learn two languages, not necessarily simultaneously but without formal instruction. Linguists working with foreign languages sometimes acquire proficiency in those languages without formal instruction but through processes which may be quite different from the ones I wish to discuss here. The situation I wish to examine is the one in which an immigrant simply enters the community and begins picking up the language. This situation is common with immigrants, among tribes that practice exogamy, and with market traders in multilingual districts.

1.3 Pidginization

1.3.1 A Pidgin

Pidginization refers to the process by which a pidgin is formed. A pidgin is not the native language of any of its speakers. It is a contact vernacular arising from a situation which is usually characterized by a multilingual population with no one common language for communication.

DeCamp (1971a) states that "Linguists now view pidgins and creoles as two phases, perhaps even as only two aspects, of the same linguistic process." (p. 13) It is not clear to whom, exactly, he is referring. Nor is it clear what he means by "the same linguistic process." If by this, he means that pidginization and creolization form part of a natural cycle, then his statement can be taken as widely accepted. Hall (1966) and Dillard (1972), for example, seem to make the pidgin origin a prerequisite for any creole language. DeCamp himself speaks of the pidgin--creole--post--creole cycle. If, on the other hand, he means that the pidginization and creolization are subject to the same forces, that is, that the changes involved in pidginization and creolization follow the same paths, then I would not agree with him. As a matter of fact, I shall give reasons why one would not expect the forces involved in the pidginization and creolization process to be the same.

1.3.2 A Creole

It was pointed out above that it is widely accepted among linguists that a creole arises when speakers of a pidgin pass that pidgin on to the next generation as a first language. To fulfill the needs of the native speakers, the language expands lexically and stylistically. While pidgins are usually short-lived, creoles may survive for generations after the original contact situation from which the pidgin arose. In such a state, we might expect that it is as stable as any normal language and undergoes change at a normal rate.

1.3.3 Decreolization

The stable state of a creole language may persist indefinitely. On the other hand, a process may begin in which the creole begins to change in the direction of the superordinate language. The initiation of this process is subject to the following two conditions: "First, the dominant official language of the community must be the standard language corresponding to the creole . . . Second, the formerly rigid social stratification must have partially (not completely) broken down." (DeCamp, ibid., p. 351) This process may cover a period of several generations and is referred to as decreolization. The product of this process has been referred to as the post-creole continuum or the creole continuum.

2. Some Similarities

2.1 Processes as Contact Situations

Any comparison of the similarities and differences in the above processes involves linguistic assumptions which are not universally accepted. The first assumption I would like to make, at least for the time being, is that there are entities which can be labeled as different languages. Although Bickerton claims that "to speak of 'dialects' or even perhaps 'languages' may be misleading," (1973, p. 643; also see 1975a, p. 166) the concept is hard to avoid at this stage of linguistic development. If this concept is accepted, then it may be said that the processes of second language acquisition and pidginization are similar in that they involve

language contact situations. Weinreich (1953) defines a language contact situation as one in which two or more languages "are used alternately by the same persons." (p. 1) In the case of second language acquisition, the two languages are the native language and the second language. In the process of pidginization, the languages are the native languages of the speakers who eventually develop the pidgin and the pidgin itself.

Although the process of creolization clearly does not fit the definition of a contact situation, one might be tempted to say that decreolization involves two languages, the creole and the superordinate. Here is where the concept of "a language" breaks down, however, for any line drawn to demarcate the product of the decreolization process from the standard variety of the superordinate language would have to be an arbitrary one. This point will be taken up further in section 2.4.

2.2 Processes with Targets

The processes of pidginization and second language acquisition are similar in that they both can be said to have a target grammar toward which the grammars of the speakers are moving. In the case of second language acquisition, the target is the standard form of the second language. The superordinate language can be thought of as the target of the pidginization process, since the person acquiring a pidgin feels that he is actually acquiring, albeit imperfectly, the superordinate language. The target of the second language acquisition process in adults is rarely reached; the target of pidginization never is. In most cases, the pidgin either dies out (as in the case of Tay Boi of Vietnam) or creolizes (like Hawaiian Pidgin). In rare cases (e.g., Tokpisin of northern New Guinea), it stabilizes, at a point quite distant from the target. Although the creole stage of the pidgin-creole-decreolization cycle cannot be said to have a target language, with the onset of decreolization, the superordinate language again becomes the target language.

2.3 Processes with Unknown Origins

It has been said that pidgins, the products of the pidginization process, are "characterized by a limited vocabulary, an elimination of many grammatical devises such as number and gender, and a drastic reduction of redundant features." (DeCamp, p. 15) This description is strikingly similar to the product of the early stages of the second language acquisition process, which has been described as "a grammar in which many of the marked-unmarked distinctions of the target language are removed, where inflected forms tend to be replaced by uninflected forms, and where preposition, auxiliary and article usage appears to be simplified." (Richards, ibid., p. 71) The notion of simplification is one which has been the topic of lively discussion in the field of pidgin and creole studies, a discussion I do not care to get into in the present paper. The point to be made, however, is that the product of pidginization seems to have syntactic characteristics in common with the product of the early stages of the second language acquisition process. Yet, the origins of the two processes are unknown. Given the other similarities between the processes of pidginization and second language acquisition, one might suspect that the origins of the two would be the same. This is a point which will be pursued further in section 4.1 below.

2.4 The Notion of a Continuum

It has been proposed (Hymes, 1971) that pidginization is a process of reduction, and creolization one of expansion, of language "in structure and function." (p. 7) Hymes certainly cannot be accused of over-explicitness in his definition of what these processes of reduction and expansion might include. Nevertheless, one may be tempted to say that the early stages of second language acquisition also involve processes of reduction and the later stages processes of expansion. Here one must take care in comparing the pidgin-creole-decreolization cycle with the processes of second language acquisition, however. The later processes are quite different from the process of creolization. Creolization involves the change from a contact language to a native language. As such, it has no goal outside of the expanded function. Bickerton (1975b) has made the interesting proposal that because of this expanded function and because of the limited linguistic data available to first generation creole speakers, those speakers must rely on certain innate universals to expand the pidgin, resulting in a product of the creolization process which is in some sense more natural than other languages. There is nothing to my knowledge equivalent to this in the second language acquisition processes.

There is, however, a situation analogous to the later stages of second language acquisition process in the decreolization process. Both involve changes in the direction of a target. These changes can best be viewed as a continuum of transition. While Bailey (1966) chooses to view variation in Jamaican Creole as the result of shifts from one system to another, she observes:

> A given speaker is likely to shift back and forth from Creole to English or something closely approximating English within a single utterance, without ever being conscious of this shift. Most observers of language in Jamaica have encountered extreme difficulty in distinguishing between the various layers of the language structure, and indeed the lines of demarcation are very hard to draw. (p. 1)

DeCamp (1971) has shown that this variation is not the result of a shift from one static system to another, but rather that it is systematic and forms a continuum from the creole to the standard. Likewise, for second language acquisition processes, Nemser (1971) assumes a series of approximate systems (L_a) which "at successive stages of learning form an evolving series, $L_{a1...n}$, the earliest occurring when a learner first attempts to use L_T (the target language), the most advanced at the closest approach of L_a to L_T." (p. 56)

Because of the presence of a target in both processes, we might suspect that the changes involved in second language acquisition and in decreolization would be subject to different forces from those at work in the process of creolization.

3. Some Differences

In addition to there being no parallel in second language acquisition processes to the creolization stage of the pidginization-creolization-decreolization cycle, there are other differences as well.

1. In the pidginization process, the pidgin speakers do not have one common language among them. Often in a plantation or trade situation, the pidgin is used among several linguistically diverse and often already multilingual groups. (See, for example, Silverstein 1972 and Sankoff and Laberge 1974 for descriptions of trade situations; Bickerton 1975a and 1975b for descriptions of plantation situations.) In second language learning situations, however, there are usually only two languages in contact.

2. In the classic plantation situation, the speakers of the superordinate language do not enter into normal social conversation with the pidgin speakers. The pidgin-creole speakers form a closed speech community in which, for the most part, language contacts are with other pidgin-creole speakers. A second language learner of the type described in section 1.2 above has most of his linguistic contact with speakers of the standard language which he is trying to learn. He therefore gets positive reinforcement from native speakers when he performs well (and either incomprehension, correction or both when he performs poorly enough), whereas the pidgin speaker will get incomprehension from fellow pidgin speakers if he performs too well (i.e., if he gets too close to the target).

3. Each speaker along the post-creole continuum has control over a considerably wide range of the spectrum and can move back and forth along points within that range at will, depending upon factors such as the physical environment, the interlocutors, and attitudes toward the subject. A second language learner, on the other hand, would not be expected to move in the direction of the base at all, except in some rather unusual circumstances. Bickerton (1975a, p. 178) cites the example of two native speakers of language A talking with a native speaker of language B in language B. If one of the native speakers of A doesn't understand something said by the native speaker of B, the other may re-phrase it without actually translating it into A.

4. While it was pointed out above (see Bailey, q.v. p. 1) that creole speakers are not often aware of the process of change taking place, for the second language learner, the process of change is a conscious one and one which he not only expects, but also hopes will take place. One might suppose that the second language learner formulates hypotheses, tests them out through observation and use, and rejects or revises them when it is seen that they don't match the data.

For all of these reasons, the changes involved in the processes of second language acquisition can be expected to be more rapid and irregular than those of the pidgin-creole-post-creole continuum. However, the processes are similar enough so that a study of one is bound to shed light on the nature of the other. A study of any of them will have insights into a theory of natural language acquisition and the nature of linguistic change.

4. Problems in a General Theory of Linguistics

A study of natural second language acquisition processes, that is, second language acquisition without teaching, can offer insights into a general theory of language in at least two areas. The first concerns the origins of "simplified," "reduced," or "mixed" languages in a language contact situation. The second concerns the nature of language change and the psychological validity of constraints on rules which express this change.

4.1 The Origins of Contact Languages

It is not coincidental that in both the areas of pidgin-creole studies and second language acquisition, the origin of the earliest stages of the mixed language is a point of debate in linguistics. It is not coincidental because first it is very difficult to find descriptions of the earliest stages of either of these processes in the linguistic literature and second until recently linguistics has been burdened with the task of describing dynamic processes in terms of static formalisms. In sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, I will briefly review the controversies as to the origins of these processes and look at some current lines of research in the pidginization process which could be applied to second language acquisition as well.

4.1.1 The Early Stages of First Language Acquisition

There are currently in vogue at least two apparently opposing theories of second language acquisition. The first, based on the principles of contrastive analysis, is most clearly expressed by Lado (1957), who states that "We must assume that the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult." (p. 2) The second hypothesis is espoused in its purest form by Dulay and Burt. (1974) They hypothesize that "the child's organization of L2 does not include transfer from (either positive or negative) or comparison with his native language, but relies on his dealing with L2 syntax as a system." (p. 115) While Dulay and Burt are talking about the acquisition of a second language by children, this position is extended to adult situations by Krashen, Madden and Bailey (1975) who, on the basis of evidence indicating that the order of acquisition of a group of English functors is virtually invariant in both adults and children learning English as a second language, regardless of the linguistic background of the learners, claim that "the important distinction, if any is to be made at all, is first language-second language. . . , and not child-adult." (p. 51) Although their conclusions are at best premature for a number of reasons, I do not wish to go into them here, but want merely to point out that there is not universal agreement as to the origins of the second language acquisition process. Between these two extremes are other attempted explanations of learners' "errors." Corder (1967), for example, proposes that "the strategies adopted by the learner of a second language are substantially the same as those by which a first language is

acquired." (p. 22) Although he is vague as to what a strategy is, he says that "The making of errors then is a strategy employed both by children acquiring their mother tongue and by those learning a second language." (p. 25) Still, he claims, the learning of a second language is different from the learning of a first, because while the first language learner may have a limitless number of hypotheses about the nature of language he is learning, the second language learner need only ask "Are the systems of the new language the same or different from those of the language I know?" (p. 27) Ervin-Tripp (1970) takes a similar position. She maintains that learners acquire language through a series of hypotheses about the language and that an inexperienced adult language learner bases his strategies on his experience with the first language. Although it is hard to accept the psychological assumption that early contrastive analysis hypotheses were based upon, i.e., that the emergence of native language influence on second language surface forms is the result of habit-motivated interference, it is equally hard to accept the claim that the first language plays no role in the second language acquisition process. It is certainly not inconceivable that both the native language and some as yet undefined universal theory of markedness are at work in the early stages of second language acquisition. (See, for example, Bickerton, 1975a, p. 172)

4.1.2 The Origins of Pidginization

Because the early stages of the pidginization process have never been observed (and may never be), the origin of that process is also a mystery. One theory is the baby-talk theory, most clearly stated by Bloomfield (1933):

> Speakers of a lower language may make so little progress learning the dominant speech, that the masters, in communicating with them resort to 'baby-talk." This "baby-talk" is the masters' imitation of the subjects' incorrect speech. There is reason to believe that it is by no means an exact imitation, and that some of its features are based not upon the subjects' mistakes but upon grammatical relations that exist within the upper language itself. The subjects, in turn deprived of the correct model, can do no better now than to acquire the simplified "baby-talk" version of the upper language. (p. 472)

Naro (1973) gives three reasons for rejecting this hypothesis with regard to West African Pidgin Portugese. First, the hypothesis pictures the speakers of the superordinate language "in the role of reaction rather than innovation," (p. 446) whereas, he points out, historical facts seem to indicate that the Europeans were the teachers of the language. Second, this language was used with Castilian-speaking noble women, who did not modify their speech in any way. Finally, he argues that the Europeans of the 15th and 16th centuries did not seem to modify the phonological form of the standard. One would suspect that if imitation were a factor the obvious accent of the Africans would also be imitated. Since it apparently wasn't, the imitation hypothesis is weakened. DeCamp points out that in Jamaica, eighteenth century accounts have the European planters learning the creole from the slaves and not vice versa. (p. 19)

Another hypothesis is that all pidgins are genetically related and that Filipino, Chinese and Caribbean pidgins are all relexifications of an original Portugese pidgin (for a discussion, see DeCamp 1971, pp. 19-23). Again, there is little documented historical evidence to support such a claim.

Kay and Sankoff (1974), assuming that surface structures which are common to unrelated language are closer to universal underlying representations than structures which are unique to a given language, propose that "contact vernaculars will tend to show a shallowness in derivational depth, that is, a surface structure more in conformity with universal deep structure." (p. 68)

In a recent proposal, Bickerton and Givón (1976) argue that "in the classic contact situation, the average speaker begins by gradually relexifying his original grammar--slotting newly-acquired vocabulary into surface structures characteristic of his own language." (p. 1) This claim is based on evidence from current pidgin speakers who underwent the pidginization process years ago. The assumption of the researchers is that the process of pidginization was "frozen" at various stages for these speakers and that the early stages of pidginization are recoverable from an examination of their outputs. Since the early stages of pidginization have never been described, and perhaps never will be, this is a fair assumption to make. Furthermore, there is no counterevidence to this claim, to my knowledge. A description of the early stages of second language acquisition which revealed this relexification actually taking place, however, would lend further support to their claim. It might also provide direct evidence for what can be considered simplification.

4.2 The Notion of Linguistic Change

Bickerton and Givón further propose that this relexification process "leads to the gradual replacement of native by non-native structures," (p. 1) which in turn is governed by forces which are general to all languages. They have suggested that one factor which affects word order shifts is the speaker's perception of such phenomena as cliticized direct objects. In pidginization, where a target exists, this cliticization has the effect of initiating change, while in the case of spontaneous change it acts as a conservative force. Other factors at work in syntactic change, they suggest, are phenomena like topicalization and ambiguity avoidance. Specific hypotheses such as these could be confirmed or disproved by studies of cases of syntactic change, both forced and spontaneous. An example of forced syntactic change which is ripe for investigation is second language acquisition.

Another area of interest for a theory of linguistics is the nature of semantic change. Bickerton (1975a) has suggested that in the early stages of decreolization, English-like formatives are introduced into the tense-aspect system of creole speakers, but they are used in a non-English way. Later, forms are added which have roughly the same function as the standard English equivalents. One question which this analysis raises is whether the order of

acquisition described by Bickerton for Guyanese Creole is a purely idiosyncratic one or whether it is the result of a general English feature acquisition order. If the former is the case, one would want to ask what is unique about the Guyanese situation to account for this apparent systematic change. Studies of other examples of semantic change would help to answer this question. If, on the other hand, the semantic change described for Guyanese Creole reflects a more general English feature acquisition order, other examples would help to determine the exact nature of the hierarchy of semantic features.

4.3 The Contribution of Second Language Acquisition Without Teaching

At this point it is necessary to return to the distinction made in the first section of this paper between second language acquisition with teaching and second language acquisition without teaching. In a situation where teaching accompanies second language acquisition, rules are made explicit by the teacher and the text. In cases of this type, one would expect the learner's perception of the data to be quite different from cases in which the analysis of the language is solely up to the learner. The order and rate of acquisition of syntactic forms and the assignment of proper semantic concepts to those forms are presumably affected by the order of presentation of the forms, the manner of presentation of those forms, and the degree to which those forms are practiced. This, after all, is the presupposition upon which language teaching is based. Therefore, for linguistic theory, an examination of second language acquisition without teaching appears, at this stage of investigation into linguistic change, to be more promising. But such an investigation would not be without its implications for both second language teaching and the teaching of a standard dialect to non-standard speakers; if teaching is to be viewed as a facilitation of the learning process we need to know what that process is before we can hope to facilitate it in anything more than a hit-and-miss fashion.

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